

**The Flores Family (taken from "The New Americans", PBS.org)**

[http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/newamericans/mexican\\_intro.html](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/newamericans/mexican_intro.html)

Pedro Flores spends a lot of time on buses and even more time away from his family. He has been separated from his wife, Ventura, and their six children for the past 13 years, seeing them only twice a year for short visits.

Pedro works as a meatpacker in Garden City, Kansas. The Flores's six children, five girls and one boy, live with Ventura on an impoverished ranch near Guanajuato, Mexico—1,200 miles and a hostile border away from Garden City.

"I want to see my family. Sometimes when I come home [to Mexico], I don't feel like going back up there. But out of necessity, I have to go back."

Pedro lives as frugally as possible in a Garden City boarding house, trying to save money so that his family can legally migrate to the U.S.

Today, Pedro is on his way home from work. He hopes that when he returns, his family will come to Kansas with him.

After the long bus ride from Kansas to Mexico, Pedro takes a cab out to his family's ranch. The driver gives him distressing news: the crops this year have all been lost. "There is nothing," he says.

The farms in this part of Mexico are now dry and barren. A severe drought has decimated the once fertile land. Poor farmers have also been unable to afford the government fees to get permission to dig wells, leaving all the irrigation water to the wealthy. Many, like Pedro, have chosen to abandon the land for opportunities in the U.S.

Pedro's homecoming is sweet and lively. The family celebrates in the small, wooden ranchito nestled at the base of the mountains, sitting on land that was once bursting with white corn and sorghum. The family is hopeful that they can get the required papers to come and go from America as they please. They have never considered crossing the border illegally.

"With papers they can come and go," says Ventura. "As wetbacks? No. Because crossing the mountains you suffer too much."

Like most parents in rural Mexico, Pedro and Ventura could not afford to keep their children in school past the sixth grade. In America, they hope things will be different. "It's beautiful to discover that through a piece of paper a person can speak," says Pedro, looking through a book with his youngest daughter. "That's why I want them to go to school."

When Pedro must return to America one last time alone, the family bids a tearful farewell. He is determined to secure the papers he needs. "Nothing is guaranteed in life. What I want to give them is like an inheritance. Because I have nothing else to give them other than those papers, so they can cross and seek their future."

On Pedro's next visit home, the family is ready. They have an immigration interview in Juarez (dubbed "Visa City" by locals) in just three days. The trip is arduous—a thousand-mile journey—and costly. There are motel rooms and bus fares for the whole family, Mexican passports and U.S. visa requirements: photos, medical exams, application fees.

The family waits in line on a Juarez bridge spanning the border between the U.S. and Mexico. "This river belongs to Mexico, but the water belongs to the U.S.," muses Pedro. "Look how little water there is now. If we could have all the water from this river for our crops in Mexico, we wouldn't need to come to the U.S."

Pedro finds out that his and one sponsor's income is not enough to sponsor the whole family in the U.S. The Floreses must find another sponsor quickly, so they work the phones. When several calls don't pan out, the children feel the stress. In tears, their youngest son Pedrito pleads with his parents not to leave him behind. "You're all going over there, and you're not going to take me," he wails. Pedro assures him that this will not happen, but also knows time is growing short.

The Flores Family stays in Juarez for a week, calling cousins and friends to secure the sponsorship needed to obtain visas for the entire family. Finally, a sponsor comes through and their visas are approved. But now they must trek back to Guanajuato to pack up their home before leaving for the border, only 500 yards from the consulate in Juarez.



Pedro, Ventura and the kids must say goodbye to family, friends and their old way of life before they begin their final journey to the border. Their farewells are bittersweet. Ventura is devastated to leave her beloved father, who blesses the family in a tearful ceremony. And Pedrito cries as he hugs the teacher who taught him to read, one last time. Pedro's father, Papa Verna, will join them in Kansas on a tourist visa.

Garden City, Kansas has embraced its rapidly growing immigrant population and provides an unexpectedly supportive environment for the Flores family. Twenty years ago, ninety percent of students in Garden City schools were native-born English speakers. Today, more than half are from immigrant families.

All the older children are allowed to enroll in high school—even the eldest daughter, Nora, who is already 18. All of the kids do well, especially Nora, who has dreamed of going back to school. She becomes a star pupil, much loved by her teachers, while young Pedrito quickly begins to master English.

But Ventura is not doing as well. "I'm here with my husband, we're all together, but I still miss Mexico," she says. "I'm confused. Everything is different here. Sometimes I think it's not worth the grief."

After six months, Ventura only feels worse. "I feel very sad here because I'm alone, and I'm not working. Pedro, at least, has work. He gets distracted at work, but it's not the same for me. I keep all my worries inside my heart. I have all this inside and no one to talk to."

Pedro and the kids are loath to leave Garden City, but Ventura so misses her home and extended family that they make the difficult decision to leave Kansas for migrant agricultural work in Mecca, California, where they can live with Ventura's sister and family.

Friends are concerned. "Usually the only people who work in the fields are the ones that don't have a green card," says Verna Franco, a friend and their visa sponsor. "You think someone with papers would work in the fields? Those with papers try to work where they'll get paid the most. This is the first family we've heard of that want to work in the fields. The first family. Since they still want to go, may God help them."

Again, the family must bid a sad farewell to friends, teachers and co-workers.

In Mecca it becomes clear how much the family has given up. They've left better jobs and schools for back-breaking field work in a state where their older children are not allowed to attend high school. The family is living with Ventura's sister—fifteen people in a single-wide trailer.

Nora attempts to balance night school with her job picking strawberries, but she is exhausted and defeated. "I thought that if I could finish high school, even if I didn't go any further, at least it would be a step forward in my life," she says. "It would have been something very beautiful, complete happiness for me. I might never finish high school, but I'm determined about one thing, and that is to learn English, because it may be the only dream that I can still realize."

Ventura is finally happy, though, surrounded by family like in Mexico. "I don't want anything bad for my daughters," she says. "Right now they don't like it yet, they aren't used to it here. We could always move. This is a world made up of people from different countries, different places. And only God knows what kind of life and luck our family will have."